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## ***Music: Szell Leads Beethoven Mass;***

Intermission Left Out to Sustain Mood

Clevelanders Perform in Carnegie Hall

By HAROLD C. SCHONBERG



PRESUMABLY it was George Szell's idea to present Beethoven's great "Missa Solemnis" without an intermission. He conducted it last night in Carnegie Hall as the first of the season's offerings by the Cleveland Symphony in New York, and it was a wonderful idea. This way one gets the consecutive sweep of the big score (1 hour, 18 minutes, last night), and there is no intermission to shatter the mood.

Mr. Szell's performance might have been expected. When he conducts, one expects clarity, good rhythm, musicianship and the kind of unobtrusively perfect technique that takes care of all contingencies. All of that we got last night. That, plus a strong infusion of drama: drama, not hysteria.

The drama came in such sections as the contralto recitative leading into the "Dona nobis pacem," where Mr. Szell drew his lines very carefully, seeing to it that a real pianissimo led into a real fortissimo; and the awesome music sounded apocalyptic. What Mr. Szell did was merely see to it that Beethoven's own indications were carefully observed. But this is something not all conductors do. As Mr. Szell conceived and executed the section, it had an overwhelming impact.

Throughout the performance there was not one measure that did not follow the letter and the spirit of the score. Even in the one episode where Mr. Szell's ideas sounded somewhat unconventional, there was nothing that contravened the text. The episode in question was the "Et vitam venturi." Mr. Szell's pacing at the outset seemed rather slow; surely slower than that of any other conductor. But the score does say "Allegretto ma non troppo," and Mr. Szell emphasized the "ma non troppo"—"but not too much."

Later, at the return of the "Et vitam venturi," there was an unusually fast tempo. But here the score does say "Allegro." The effect in both cases was convincing and interesting. At the slow tempo, those hard-to-sing high B flats do not sound as driven and shrill as they normally do. And with the fast tempo—an episode in which the B flats do not appear—there was a bracing, exciting forward movement.

It took confidence in the chorus to take the "Et vitam venturi" so fast. But the Cleveland Orchestra Chorus took the tempo in stride. Trained by Robert Shaw, it is a big group, but a very responsive one, with young, fresh, clear voices. The singers did themselves proud, and so did the solo quartet—Saramae Endich, Florence Kopleff, Ernst Haefliger and Ezio Flagello. Miss Endich had a little trouble at the beginning. Her voice sounded fluttery and ill-focused. Later she settled down to a smoother type of singing.

Miss Kopleff used her big voice with artistry and restraint. She produced a big sound only when she had to, but when she did, it was thrilling. The men were excellent. Mr. Haefliger is an experienced

hand at this music, and Mr. Flagello's robust voice, down to the necessary low F, was a joy to hear. Mention, too, should be made of Rafael Druian's accomplished playing in the "Benedictus." He is the concertmaster of the Cleveland Orchestra.

But the big hero was the conductor. Mr. Szell led a beautifully proportioned, carefully detailed performance. It may sound like an inconsistent pair of words to use, but the outstanding feeling of the performance was one of controlled exaltation. Mr. Szell saw the work whole, and captured its magnitude, strength, poetry and drama. At the same time he never let his emotions run away with him. One must go back to Toscanini for this kind of "Missa Solemnis."

<https://www.nytimes.com/1967/02/07/archives/music-szell-leads-beethoven-mass-intermission-left-out-to-sustain.html>

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